

<http://www.religiousintelligence.co.uk/news/?NewsID=4698>

An influential US body has called on President Barack Obama to raise issues of religious freedom on his state visit to Russia.

The appeal was made in a letter from the **US Commission on International Religious Freedom**, an independent US government commission established by Congress to monitor religious freedom worldwide and make policy recommendations to the executive and legislative branches.

In their letter, they say: “For 10 years the Commission has reported on the status of freedom of religion or belief in Russia, and this year the Commission decided to add Russia to its Watch List. This decision was based on several negative new policies and trends, particularly the establishment in early 2009 of a new body in the Ministry of Justice with unprecedented powers to recommend measures to control religious groups.

“There also are increasing violations of religious freedom by government officials, particularly against allegedly “non-traditional” religious groups and Muslims, based on the government’s interpretation and application of Russian laws, such as on religious organizations, non-governmental organizations, and extremism. Russian officials continue to describe certain religious and other groups as alien to Russian culture and society, and there has been a sharp rise in xenophobia and intolerance, including anti-Semitism, resulting in numerous violent attacks and other crimes. The Russian government has chronically failed to address these serious problems adequately, consistently, or effectively. “

The Commission calls on President Obama to raise ‘serious US concerns’ with President Medvedev.